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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the First Year Program at Westminster College in Pennsylvania, which has implemented a new, progressive curriculum that prominently features the basic communication course, and an initial attempt to evaluate the program. The paper begins with a description of the content and goals of the basic communication course, which is followed by descriptions of the Writing and Inquiry 1 and 2 courses comprising the rest of the First Year Program. It then explains ways the foundational courses have been linked to encourage the habit of searching for connected knowledge. Finally, the paper presents methods used and results obtained in a preliminary analysis of student feedback. Appendixes contain sample instructions and questions to participants, and examples of participant answers. (EF)

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New Approaches:

The Basic Course as Part of an Integrated First Year Program

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CS 510 240

New Approaches

The Basic Course as Part of an Integrated First Year Program

"Coloring outside the lines" is a fitting way to describe what curriculum developers have done at Westminster College in Pennsylvania. A private, liberal arts college with about 100 faculty and 1,500 undergraduate students, Westminster has recently adopted a new and progressive curriculum that prominently features the basic communication course. The course is part of an integrative four-course (two per semester) First Year Program. The other courses that are included in the First Year Program are Writing, Inquiry I and Inquiry II. The First Year Program is intended to provide important foundational knowledge to students, including oral communication skills, written communication skills, computer and library skills, and an introduction to the liberal arts. This paper describes the unique First year Program and an initial attempt to evaluate it.

Explanation of the Curriculum

In addition to the First Year Program, students are required to take a variety of Intellectual Perspective courses (liberal education requirements) as well as one Cluster Course and a Capstone course. Oral and written communication components are required in all courses designated as Intellectual Perspective courses. These requirements are consistent with the "speaking across the curriculum" movement. When "writing across the curriculum" programs were taking hold at universities across the country in the mid-1980s, Steinfatt (1986) argued for equal attention to oral communication. An across the curriculum design assumes that one course in a particular subject area is not enough; that the subject should be addressed across disciplines. Therefore, the speaking across the

curriculum design requires the inclusion of communication modules in non-communication courses. Summarizing evaluations of oral communication across the curriculum programs, Cronin and Glenn (1991) found that communication intensive courses received positive reactions from students and faculty, and improved student oral communication skills and knowledge (as assessed by faculty, students, and independent judges). Of course, the oral communication across the curriculum model is not without problems. Training is necessary for faculty members, who often lack experience in oral communication instruction and evaluation (Cronin & Grice, 1993). Also, the model may also imply that communication is a service discipline, or worse, that anyone can teach oral communication (Braithwaite, 1988; Mix, 1987). Westminster College has addressed these problems by creating a regular dialogue between communication faculty and faculty from other disciplines, as well as the sharing of assessment ideas and materials through meetings, workshops, faculty forums and shared computer drives.

Overall, the new curriculum was designed to better prepare students for the future global, diverse, and technological world, through a strong liberal arts background. To appreciate the First Year Program, let's look at the nature of the basic communication course, the nature of the three other courses, and the integration of the four as a holistic foundational program.

The Basic Oral Communication Course

According to Cronin and Glenn (1991), the rationale for an oral communication core requirement has been based on information that college graduates were not adequately skilled in communicating, whether through speaking or writing. Adding a required basic course in communication can have lasting benefit to students, and can also

serve to create awareness about the credibility of the communication discipline among other campus faculty, administrators, and funding agents. Pearson, Nelson, and Sorenson (1981) found that 93% of alumni favored the basic communication course as an important requirement for graduation. According to Hart (1993), communication teaching will always be with us because "freedom goes to the articulate" (p. 101). That is, the basic course can help to empower students to gain influence through command of the spoken word. In a recent survey, Hersh (1997) found that CEOs and human resources managers look for three clusters of skills in prospective employees: cognitive (e.g., problem solving and critical thinking), presentational (oral and written), and social (e.g., ability to work with others and intercultural competence). A liberal arts education that features oral communication as a principle component provides an excellent means to proficiency in these skills.

Hart (1993) noted that because of its ubiquitous nature, the communication discipline shares similarities to Philosophy, English, Psychology, and Sociology. While maintaining conceptual independence, Communication touches on content and methods from other fields. Furthermore, in recent decades, the communication discipline has moved beyond its identification with performance-based skills, and has elevated itself to mandate a social science agenda (Macke, 1991). All of the above factors prime the basic course for prominent inclusion as a core requirement at liberal arts colleges. In response, at Westminster College, the basic oral communication course has been placed into an integrated first year program.

Our course is called Oral Communication and is taught for one semester. Half of the first year students take the course in the first semester, and half take it in their second

term. The course is taught in hybrid form, containing content related to communication elements and definitions, self-concept, verbal and nonverbal messages, public speaking, and group communication. The course clearly emphasizes public speaking theory and skills, with over half of the semester dedicated to speaking in public. Assignments include a short experience talk, a demonstration speech, a preview of the informative speech, the informative speech, a persuasive speech, and a group presentation. Percentages for each assignment are predetermined and agreed upon by all communication faculty members. Instructors are expected to use these assignments, as well as midterm and final exams, but may assign other additional work. Therefore, instructors have some autonomy in teaching the course. In keeping with the college's mission, students are taught to use smart classroom technology (including PowerPoint) as part of the course, as well.

There are a few major goals inherent in the course: (1) to help students develop a sense of appreciation for the importance of communication in their lives, (2) to help students to understand their own communication a bit better, and (3) to help students to begin a personal communication skill development process (leaving the class with greater skill than when they began). Of course, these goals are not unusual to those who teach any basic course oral communication course. What *is* unusual, is the fourth goal added by the Westminster College First Year Program: to (4) demonstrate how communication is related to other student coursework and the liberal arts. Communication instructors are encouraged to actively refer to content in the other First Year Program courses, explaining its relationship to communication. So, what is that content? Furthermore, how is it relevant to communication?

Other Courses in the First Year Program

Using a speaking across the curriculum approach, Westminster College has positioned the basic oral communication course as a foundational linchpin in the first year experience, but also as one that relates to other important courses in the first year and after. First Year courses, as well as Intellectual Perspective courses, carry oral communication components and reinforce theory and skills taught in the basic oral communication course.

Developers of the new curriculum thought that writing and a general introduction to the liberal arts were just as crucial to first year students as oral communication. Writing is the basic writing course, complete with information about library methods and research, observation and prewriting, effective sentences and common errors, drafting and revising. Like Oral Communication, Writing is also taught for one semester, with half of the first year students taking the course in the first semester, and half taking it in their second term. The major goals of the writing course include helping students to understand uses for written expression, patterns of organization, modes of logic, research techniques and documentation styles, and the process and technology involved in writing. Although individual instructors may customize the course to some degree, assignments include written papers based on personal narrative, observation, exposition, and argument.

Inquiry I & II are sister courses intended to provide an introduction to the liberal arts, but in different ways. Inquiry I is taught during the first semester and addresses "ways of knowing." The class encourages students to think critically from multiple perspectives through varied common texts and films (some classical, some from popular

culture). Critical thinking, and library and technology skills receive special focus in this class. Ways of knowing include concepts such as intuition, superstition, authority, faith, and science. These concepts are compared, contrasted, and viewed from the perspective of various scholarly disciplines throughout history. Readings and assignments in Inquiry I occur simultaneously across all sections, and include written papers and oral presentations that stress critical thinking skills based on the provided readings.

Inquiry II, taught during the second semester, addresses "ways of acting," investigating human behavior and adaptation over centuries. Instructors focus on the ways that humans have structured their families, economies, politics, religions, and social organizations. Students choose classes based on one of four possible themes, including the American Dream, Violence, Technology, or the Environment. Because of the thematic nature of the course, Inquiry II instructors enjoy more flexibility in creating individual schedules and assignments than Inquiry I instructors. Similar to Inquiry I, this course emphasizes critical thinking skills, and varied perspectives. For example, the problem of violence may be analyzed from literature in the fields of psychology, philosophy, sociology, art, theology, history, and biology. Also mandated by the First Year Program, Inquiry II requires that students complete a community service project that fully immerses them in ways of acting.

An Integrated Foundation

Foundational bricks are worthless without strong mortar, and skilled artisans that build from the ground up. The unique nature of the First Year Program lies not in the existence of the four classes, but in their integration. In stressing the interconnected nature of knowledge and relationships among and between liberal arts perspectives, the

college helps students get into the habit of learning for life. Students come to realize that no class is a waste of time; all knowledge is meaningful and useful in all other arenas in life. Hopefully, the habit of searching for connected knowledge follows students throughout college and into later vocational endeavors. This is the desired outcome of a liberal art education. Of course, linked courses require integrated information sharing, syllabi planning, and weekly update-and-planning meetings for faculty. After countless hours of meetings and debate, the resultant First Year Program has provided a platform for demonstrating that these, and all courses, are relevant to one another in some way.

Let's look at a few examples of ways that the courses have been linked. First, as Inquiry I classes contemplate their first reading, Plato's *Allegory of the Cave,* Oral Communication instructors can make reference to the same reading when discussing concepts such as perception (i.e., that communication and understanding are bound by selective processes), communication and self concept (i.e., that self-knowledge is limited by communication with others in a limited environment), and audience analysis (i.e., knowledge of the receivers' varied perceptions is crucial to public speaking). Writing can choose the same reading in order to analyze writing style. In other words, Inquiry readings become common examples for all first year courses, with each instructor drawing out meaning for his/her discipline. Skills become transferable between courses, as well. Inquiry I and II instructors can ask students to use their writing skills in a paper, or their oral communication skills in a speech. All four courses make use of one consistent documentation style, and all four courses expect a similar level of expertise with library and technological tools.

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Let's take another example. Inquiry I classes spend a considerable amount of time discussing nature-nurture and science-religion issues. Readings cover topics such as diverse as evolution, religion, sexual orientation, and the purpose of education, and include authors as wide-ranging as Plato, Stephen Hawking (physicist), Abraham Maslow, and Betty Edwards (art educator). Oral Communication and Writing can use that content to demonstrate how to evaluate evidence and source credibility in persuasive argument. Specifically, the basic communication course draws on these writings, asking questions such as: How does Bettelheim provide supporting evidence for the need for magic? What organizational pattern does Byne use to challenge biological evidence of homosexuality? In what writings can students find dramatic imagery, metaphor, or alliteration?

Additionally, Oral Communication, Writing, and Inquiry I and II instructors strongly encourage students to "cross pollinate" topics of interest to them. For example, a student who researches various disciplines about the concept of love may use that research to write a paper for Writing or Inquiry I or II, or to create an informative or persuasive speech in Oral Communication. This cross-pollination is useful, because it can teach valuable lessons to students such as realizing that the same information must be adapted for specialized audiences and purposes, and that the process of creating speeches is significantly different than the process of writing.

Of course, it is also easier to compare the Oral Communication and Writing courses, because many of the steps in the processes of creating papers and speeches are similar in nature. Both classes help to instill thoughtful and ethical practices of information gathering, audience analysis, organizing, outlining, presenting, and

evaluating for any presentation, whether written or spoken. Finally, Inquiry I and II classes have made a reciprocal effort to encourage students to use the writing and speaking skills they are learning. All professors involved in the program have also attempted to use consistent methods of evaluating students' writing and speaking in the classroom. In general, each First Year Program faculty member has made a concentrated effort to know about content in other classes, and to discuss that content as often as possible as it applies to his/her own material.

First Year Program faculty members remain enthusiastic about the program and its place in the new curriculum, and are becoming comfortable with its content. Regarding students, however, I wanted to systematically solicit feedback.

Method

I decided to use focus groups as the method of student evaluation of the First Year Program. Focus groups provide a useful method of studying undergraduate students' attitudes because the information is so context-bound (Valentine, 1993). Focus groups offer a great way to elicit multiple perspectives and realities (Brotherson, 1994), which was a major goal in my evaluation. Furthermore, focus groups enable natural environment, and a unique opportunity for participants to reflect on their judgements and the judgements of others (Elling, 1997).

My small group communication students received extra credit for encouraging their friends to participate as my initial pool of subjects. Unfortunately, this initial pool was rather small, consisting of 13 people: 11 sophomores and 2 juniors; 5 males and 8 females. Participants were scheduled to attend 3 separate one-hour sessions, which resulted in sessions of seven (session one), four (session two), and two (session three)

respondents. I provided donuts at the sessions, and verbally encouraged a relaxed atmosphere. I provided a brief written contract that respondents signed, explaining the voluntary nature of their participation and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendix A). I also verbally instructed participants that no answers would be considered "right" or "wrong," to avoid mention of instructors' names, and that my purpose was simply to solicit various points of view about the First Year Program. I also explained that my role in facilitating the group was to moderate and probe for explanation and clarification, and I attempted to avoid bias in my responses to participants' comments. I the same questions in each focus group, inspiring feedback about each course in the First Year Program, and about the program as a whole (see Appendix B).

Results

From this preliminary analysis, I have interpreted several emergent themes that relate to program and course goals. (Respondents' answers appear in Appendix C.)

Respondents generally responded positively about the writing course. The goals of the course included helping students understand uses for written expression, patterns of organization, modes of logic, research techniques and documentation styles, and the process and technology involved in writing. Comments frequently centered around satisfaction with skill acquisition:

> "I think my teacher made me go from high school right up to college here. Even my friends told me, wow you can write very well." "She was hard but, like, when we handed in the paper she highlighted what we did wrong, and you would click on it and it said how to fix it, and we sent it back and she would rise our grade. It was really hard but I learned a lot." "I think it was pretty good, like the papers that they assigned. They were all real different and it helped to write a little bit better I think." "you could choose whatever you wanted, like I chose to compare and contrast instant mashed potatoes and bathroom spackle. I liked the freedom that we were allowed to write with." "I loved my writing class. I really learned how to write a cohesive paper." "By the end, I felt like a pretty strong writer."

Negative evaluation of Writing had to do with problems with specific assignments (e.g., "We wrote a group paper, but it was difficult, because they were so bad. People could not agree on what to write"), or perceived inequity in professors' grading:

> "My professor was really tough. They should even it out a little bit more, like, everybody has to write the same papers, but the way they grade is totally different, I don't know. I did the work that other classes did but I didn't get the grades that other classes got."

The major goals of Oral Communication are development of appreciation for communication, understanding of self, and skill development. Students seemed to indicate growth in all three areas:

> "It was the one class that I felt was worth getting out of bed the whole semester." "I enjoyed the class, like how to put a speech together. I thought that was important and fun." "It was about getting comfortable. I hated giving speeches, but knowing what to say and how to get the audience interested. I honestly think it was a good class because it made me more comfortable." "The group think was good, you could see what people took what roles, like compromising." "I had no idea how to talk in front of people until I took speech. Like I was terrified, and I still am, but not as much." "You are going to do that for the rest of your life, so to get that as a freshman course would be beneficial." "That kind of brought us together, and we learned from each other."

Negative comments about Oral Communication tended to focus on criticism of specific content or unfair evaluation:

> "I don't think the course pays attention to body movement and gestures." "I just think sometimes they expect too much and sometimes they expect too little and it just hurts the student. Like for [name], she has a lot of experience, so she obviously has experience, but for me, I didn't have any experience until I went into speech, so they might have expected too much."

Inquiry I, "ways of knowing," received generally favorable remarks. It seems that many of the respondents did learn to think critically from multiple perspectives:

> "you could get different points of view and arguments from different people. That was the biggest thing out of that class." "I got stuff out of it, and I really became more open-minded about a lot of stuff." "I really felt like we were moving

somewhere, and that I was being challenged, to really think about stuff." "The professor was good. We'd pick apart the readings and that was good."

Others liked getting a feeling of special treatment from their instructors:

> "We just said what we thought, and he made it more enjoyable to go to class, I mean there were times when other classes, everyone had to watch those group Inquiry movies and he never watched one of those." "One time we went to the professor's house and watched a movie and you don't get that in any other class, and I don't think I'll ever get that again."

Some participants reacted negatively to the course, citing pressure to adopt "correct" beliefs, or frustration with the requirement, or equality across sections:

> "I had a professor who, if you didn't have his interpretations, you didn't have it. I really didn't like that at all. I felt like there was no room for your personal opinion." "I just thought it was gearing you to think one way. You know, economically and politically right way. Even though you were supposed to use your own thought processes, you were still supposed to come to the same collective reasoning."

> "There was no consistency, I mean in Inquiry I, at all. Some people had really easy classes where they did nothing, which I'm not saying is good, and some people had classes that were really informative and a lot of fun and some people had classes where there was so much extra work that our professor felt like our class was the only class that we had that semester." "I could talk to someone who had a completely different Inquiry teacher and the class was like it wasn't even the same class." "It was the luck of the draw."

> "People got such a negative attitude. They were like, why do I have to take this class? This has no relation to my major. People had so much work that was just a freshman class that you had to take. I felt like, you know, it doesn't count, like who cares. A class you're forced to take. I think a lot of people had that attitude."

Inquiry II, "ways of acting," received the least favorable comments during these sessions. Intended to investigate human behavior and adaptation over centuries, students failed to see its relevance or usefulness, although a few positive comments emerged:

> "I had a really good teacher and had a lot of fun. I don't know that I learned a lot." "It was actually kind of fun to dissect the movie and how it related to integration and becoming a member of the country and some of the things they do to get there and, I don't know, it wasn't like we took some no-name movie from national geographic that nobody wanted to watch." "I liked the abstract thought. It

helped me adjust. You know, getting you to think in different ways." "ya, I agree. It made you start looking at things from a whole bunch of different perspectives. High school's kind of like, straight line thought. It's not really the same."

"I don't think it had anything to do with anything. I just don't see where I'll ever use that again." "It was bad, it was really bad. I had violence and we just talked about communism and stuff. I don't know he had good ideas, but . . .it just never got me thinking on my own." "In inquiry II, he'd ask what was your interpretation of what you read, and you'd tell him, and he'd say, no I don't think that's right, and I thought, you asked for my interpretation, what do you want from me?" "All the greek philosophy stuff, I mean, it was a lot of readings that I had trouble understanding. I don't think the professor did a good job of explaining them." "It was too abstract. For a first year student, you're just getting your mind set about what you do and think and it's like, you're still growing. It should be taken on an upper-level course."

When I asked whether students saw relationships between the courses, they were able to articulate many of them. Furthermore, they were able to provide examples of the usefulness of the material since taking the courses:

"We had to write a paper in writing about something we'd done in inquiry and then we had to speak on it afterward. That was probably the best example." "You're gonna have to do it. They both made you more comfortable with both parts of life; writing and speaking." "You write to speak, it's like the same thing, instead of putting on paper, you're putting it in words." "I think that in all of them, ethics seemed to come up a lot." "I saw a big relationship between speech, writing, and inquiry I, cause I think that there were elements of changing view points and expressing your ideas."

"I'll be doing something random and I'll think of something that we discussed in inquiry" "I do that too." "Even though I didn't like inquiry I, I think about some of that information sometimes, about authorities and stuff, I try to apply them to my classes." "I'm going to be using my speech skills pretty soon, I'm going to have to give a speech for an upcoming ciass. And writing skills, you use them on all the midterm papers." "You had to become very, very tolerant. That's probably the one thing that I took away from inquiry, the one thing of value. That 's not just something you need for college, that's something you need for life, like in the workplace."

Finally, most students expressed the desire to keep Oral Communication, Writing, and Inquiry I a part of the First year Program:

> "I think speech and writing belong in the first year, for sure. You're gonna have more writing and talk all through your four years." "Writing and speech are good to have your first year. I use those the most." "I don't think the school should make people teach it. I had a professor who didn't want to teach it so he didn't." "writing and speech should definitely be taken in the first year, and maybe even in the same semester, to brush up and make sure you're prepared in those areas."

Discussion

The goal of the First Year Program has been to arm students with the theory and skills necessary for success at a liberal arts college (and for life), while demonstrating that varied perspectives are related, and can be equally valid. A related goal was to level the playing field, to equalize students' opportunities to acquire important foundational skills. As an added bonus resulting from the program, professors can now safely make assumptions about sophomores' critical thinking, speaking, and writing knowledge and abilities. As we begin the third year of the first year program, we continue to adapt it, based on feedback from students and faculty. Some of the changes between years one and two included adjustment of the daily schedule, elimination of weekly Inquiry plenary sessions, more autonomy for Inquiry II faculty, and some minor content changes. Very few changes were made between years two and three.

So far, students have reported moderate satisfaction with the first year program. Although they seem pleased with the First Year Program content overall, they report some frustration with perceived inequity among class sections, and the inability to schedule other courses, or courses that "count" in their first year. From these preliminary analyses, support appears weakest for Inquiry II, but seems much more positive for the other three First Year courses. Initiating the First Year Program has represented a major shift in the student experience here at Westminster College. Full acceptance and

appreciation for the program will certainly take some time. We will continue responding to feedback until then.

Appendix A

Instructions to Participants

Discussion of the First Year Program

Thanks for participating! I'm conducting this research for a paper that I'm presenting at the National Communication Association Convention.

Please be aware that it is my ethical duty to protect your answers today. I will not connect your answers to you in any way in this research. Your name will not be used, and I will not share your answers with people on this campus.

Helping with this research today is purely voluntary on your part. It is your right to ask questions or quit at any time without penalty.

Cary Horvath (7199)

Please keep this copy for your records.

Discussion of the First Year Program

Thanks for participating! I'm conducting this research for a paper that I'm presenting at the National Communication Association Convention.

Please be aware that it is my ethical duty to protect your answers today. I will not connect your answers to you in any way in this research. Your name will not be used, and I will not share your answers with people on this campus.

Helping with this research today is purely voluntary on your part. It is your right to ask questions or quit at any time without penalty.

Cary Horvath (7199)

Please sign this copy to indicate your willingness to participate:

_____

Appendix B

Questions to Participants

1. (4 separate questions) Think about the content, assignments, and goals of [Writing, Speech, Inquiry I, Inquiry II] class. What worked well in that class? What did you like?
2. (4 separate questions) Think about the content, assignments, and goals of [Writing, Speech, Inquiry I, Inquiry II] class. What did not work well in that class? What didn't you like?
3. What relationships did you, or do you now see between Speech and Writing, or Writing and Inquiry, or Speech and Inquiry, etc.?
4. Have you remembered and/or used information from any of the First Year Program classes since you took them?
5. Do all of these courses belong in the first year? If you were in charge of the curriculum here at the college, would you change the First Year program? If so, how?

Appendix C

Participant Answers

1, 2. (Writing) "I had the greatest Writing teacher. I think my teacher made me go from high school right up to college here. Even my friends told me, wow you can write very well." "I thought I was a really good writer when I came to this school, and I handed back this paper and he tore it apart and . . . at the end of the semester we could revise and turn it back in, and I don't know, I'm not such a bad writer." "I also enjoyed the Writing teacher that I had. He taught us a lot about how to write but not in the way that you had to learn the grammar behind it, you just learned how to look through our papers and find out things, and we talked about it a lot." "Ya, there was a lot of discussion, like, it wasn't all lecture." "My particular writing teacher spent a lot of time at the end of the semester when he would just meet with us individually to talk about what we could do to improve; we didn't have class." "I had the same professor as you and it helped a lot because he made us think on a different level and analyze it differently than I normally would have. That helped a lot because it made me think from a different point of view." "This is probably going to give away who I had but we watched a lot of movies in class, um, I really liked it though, for example, we did Much Ado About Nothing and we would take the book and the play and the screenplay and we would watch the movie and break it down and we would write about every stage and how they differed and it was really nice to read about something and see it and see how somebody else interprets it and acts it out and that gives you two different perspective to write on, and I think that the particular professor did a really good job because she gave us a whole extra pool in looking at the writing." "I enjoyed my writing class because whenever we were writing in the semester we has to write three stories and um, we were given choices to pick from, you could make it individual like a month to write it, revise it, and you got suggestions back and you could rewrite it and make it better for a better grade." "My writing teacher was extremely difficult. She was hard but, like, when we handed in the paper she highlighted what we did wrong, and you would click on it and it said how to fix it, and we sent it back and she would rise our grade. It was really hard but I learned a lot." "I really like the way it was set up, it incorporated inquiry and speech. Also, it was a lot of writing and papers and stuff." "that's pretty much all we did was grammatical stuff. We wrote, I think three papers, that was it. My instructor was a very strict grader, you had to actually put some thought into it." "I really liked it. We spent every Thursday in the computer lab, and we got to write during that time, and the instructor would walk around and help us out. I though that was a really good thing to do." "we maybe met once a week in the second half of the semester. You know, if he ever wanted to meet with us, he'd call us into the computer lab and the rest of the time he just said work on your papers, and we'd have to meet with him for like 10 minutes on the day you were supposed to have class to discuss it and that was about it. I pretty much liked that. You had a lot more freedom." "If they wanted to do more of something more abstract, they should have done a writing lab, or you're just gonna try to cram everything in and

get that done." "I think it was pretty good, like the papers that they assigned. They were all real different and it helped to write a little bit better I think." "we had a basic theme for the paper but you could write about anything that you wanted to, like we had to write a compare and contrast essay, but you could choose whatever you wanted, like I chose to compare and contrast instant mashed potatoes and bathroom spackle. I liked the freedom that we were allowed to write with." "I loved my writing class. I really learned how to write a cohesive paper. The book was interesting and we were allowed to pick our topics, an it's a lot easier to write when you're interested in what you write about. It was about making the paper cohesive and that you used the best language you possibly could to express your thoughts. I spent hours pouring over papers. One day a week we'd be in the computer lab, and we could apply stuff we were working on." "It got you pretty in depth on how the research process works and everything. She got you into the flow of how everything works. By the end, I felt like a pretty strong writer." (assignments) "I liked them" "they were challenging" "I liked them" "The paper about the book stands out in my mind" "ya that would be the best one, because you were thinking about different points of view. Like he would bring up words that I would never think of, like I would never think of using the word white, you know, would mean something else. You know, that helped a lot."

"We were reading a book and that was fun and all, but there were no grades on it. It felt like it was just taking up time." "I had a hard time following the book because the examples were so strange and you just got hung up on it. I didn't like the grammar section." "We wrote a group paper, but it was difficult, because they were so bad. People could not agree on what to write. I don't even think she ended up grading them. I don't feel comfortable having somebody else. . ." "I didn't mind it at all. It was 50-50." "they corrected your grammatical errors, but they really didn't instruct you on it. Coming into college you should know all that, but I thought that's what it should have focused more on." "my professor was really tough. They should even it out a little bit more, like, everybody has to write the same papers, but the way they grade is totally different, I don't know. I did the work that other classes did but I didn't get the grades that other classes got." "it just took up too much time." "I didn't have too much of a problem with the writing course." "I didn't have a problem, it was just a lot of work."

(speech) "I absolutely loved the course." "It was fun. He was a lot of fun. We had a really good group of people. There was one speech, I think it was the demonstration speech. We had somebody get up and do a demonstration on kissing. There were some fun speeches. Some of it was lecture, and he would just leave you rolling. It was the one class that I felt was worth getting out of bed the whole semester." "I did not enjoy my speech teacher at all. I enjoyed the class, like how to put a speech together. I thought that was important and fun. We got to pick out our own topics, like how to get your point across and make it interesting." "Mine was all right. I thought the book was stupid. And the whole test was on the book and it was mostly memorization and definitions." "Our class was at 7:40 and he was very monotone and he would lecture. No one was awake and you would feel bad for the speakers." "Ours was at 12:50 and everyone was

pretty upbeat about it." "My speech class, I wouldn't say it was about learning. But it was about getting comfortable. I hated giving speeches, but knowing what to say and how to get the audience interested. I honestly think it was a good class because it made me more comfortable. Usually you're all uptight and I can get up in front of people and be more comfortable. It helped a lot but I don't know that I learned a lot. The class was beneficial, but I don't think the book was. The group think was good, you could see what people took what roles, like compromising." "We learned how to use the equipment and use it in our speech." "Ya to make everything go smoothly so it would be enjoyable for whoever was listening." "It's hard to use powerpoint, and I've used it a couple times now." "I had no idea how to talk in front of people until I took speech. Like I was terrified, and I still am, but not as much." "Speech class is excellent for people, especially people with that kind of phobia, because you are going to do that for the rest of your life, so to get that as a freshman course would be beneficial." "up until I took the class I had an intense fear of speaking in public. I don't want to say a fear of it, but this still happens sometimes, my arms just shake uncontrollably, and I'm like talking with my hands and I can just see my hand shaking like this and I'm trying to stop, and I'd like to think I have a little bit better control of it right now." "the material was very clear, and it was very clear what was expected of us, and it went along with the book" "I really liked the persuasive speech. It turned out to be really good." "I thought the book was very good. My high school speech course, it was a blow-off course, you got up, you talked, you get an A. This one was a lot different." "I liked the guest speaker, too." "I agree with that. The presentation on technology was good."

I didn't learn anything from it, except the group speech. That kind of brought us together, and we learned from each other." "We were in a dumb classroom and we didn't have any of the visuals, like we had to rely on posters." "I think it would have been nice to use the equipment for one or two speeches, or whatever, but I talked to people who said that they had to use it all the time." "It could have incorporated a little more impromptu speaking." "I agree with that." "I was more used to planned speeches, coming from high school speech class, so I was more memorized, also, I don't think the course pays attention to body movement and gestures. I've noticed a lot of people, even adults, like professors, aren't very careful in the way they're moving, not at all. It can give you a headache sometimes cause of the way they're flyin around, and you can tell when someone is very comfortable in front of a class by the way they move. The way a person walks and gestures and body movement should be focused on." "I'd forget to quote sources, and it kind of broke up the flow of the speech." "I think they should look at each individual student differently, because we come from different backgrounds. I just think sometimes they expect too much and sometimes they expect too little and it just hurts the student. Like for [name], she has a lot of experience, so she obviously has experience, but for me, I didn't have any experience until I went into speech, so they might have expected too much." "I didn't like being taught all day every day on powerpoint."

(Inquiry I) "Discussion was probably the biggest thing because you could get different points of view and arguments from different people. That was the biggest thing out of that class." "some of the readings were hard and you couldn't relate to. You couldn't say anything about them until the professor went over it really well." "I ended up with a very good professor, I liked my professor, um he basically did a lot of, I mean we read the stories and we talked about them, and we just said what we thought, and he made it more enjoyable to go to class, I mean there were times when other classes, everyone had to watch those group Inquiry movies and he never watched one of those. We watched, like 12 Angry Men, and then talked about that, and we watched Lord of the Flies, just different things that made it more enjoyable." "We had a very hard teacher, but it got better, but if you took it and the ideas she was throwing at you, I got stuff out of it, and I really became more open-minded about a lot of stuff. She really knew what she was talking about and she was very hard on us. But by the end of the year she was getting what she wanted out of us. We would do things, we would take a reading and she would make us act it out with our bodies and you had to think about it, you know, totally tear apart the passage and redo a story. She did different things that made you really think about it and change your perspective, and I don't know. We had a party after Inquiry was done, and I don't think it was that bad." "We just like to complain." "One time we went to the professor's house and watched a movie and you don't get that in any other class, and I don't think I'll ever get that again." "I liked all the different views you got. It kind of, like, gave you a more open-minded view of everything." "ya., I liked all the readings that they had." "Ya, they were good." "In inquiry I, she valued every opinion and she listened to you when you talked." "I enjoyed it because I enjoyed the professor." "I'm a pro-inquiry I person. It was very tough, but somehow she got us to come up and meet her standards. I worked so hard in that class, it was insane. In inquiry I, I really felt like we were moving somewhere, and that I was being challenged, to really think about stuff." "The professor was good. We'd pick apart the readings and that was good." "the common assignment, it was really valuable to do it in the stages that we did it. The kind of preparation that was going to go into a project like that." "I agree with that, but we did that in writing class."

"I had a professor who, if you didn't have his interpretations, you didn't have it. I really didn't like that at all. I felt like there was no room for your personal opinion. I just kinda felt like you couldn't read those articles and walk away with one set. . . the whole point of the class was to make you take different viewpoints and make you be able to see different points of view, but if you didn't have the point of view that he wanted you to have, you were basically told that you has it all wrong, and I didn't like that." "We had to watch all those movies. It was terrible because there was no consistency, I mean in Inquiry I, at all, some people had really easy classes where they did nothing, which I'm not saying is good, and some people had classes that were really informative and a lot of fun and some people had classes where there was so much extra work that our professor felt like our class was the only class that we had that semester. When we wrote that final paper, we had so many stages that we had to turn in, at least 10, where other

classes had, like 6. There was no consistency. I could talk to someone who had a completely different Inquiry teacher and the class was like it wasn't even the same class." "It was the luck of the draw." "[laptop] I don't think that was beneficial at all, it made it worse because you had people in the class who knew it already, and the system was always shutting down and they were more of a distraction than anything. You would just sit there and check your e-mail and you couldn't find the stuff that you wanted and I didn't think that it was at all beneficial." "Inquiry had a lot of potential, but it just wasn't done right. Like the consistency, and some of those readings were just really stupid." "maybe if you could relate to them." "People got such a negative attitude. They were like, why do I have to take this class? This has no relation to my major. People had so much work that was just a freshman class that you had to take. I felt like, you know, it doesn't count, like who cares. A class you're forced to take. I think a lot of people had that attitude. I know when I was a freshman a lot of the sophomores had that same attitude. They were like, oh my god, I hated inquiry, I'm so sorry you have to take it still. People that didn't have to take it would just laugh at us and say ha-ha, you have to take that class." "I didn't mind the readings. I mean, I enjoyed my class because I enjoyed my professor that I had for that class, but I just had a hard time seeing how the readings related to each other, or to even teaching us anything. I mean, like, whenever they passed out the forms that say what do you think could be changed, I just said, make it make sense, seeing how everything connected in the class." "it was kind of hard sometimes to see how they connected." "I didn't really agree with everything that inquiry had to deal with after my freshman year. I've calmed down since then because I've been out of it, you know. I just felt that it was geared to making, you know everyone was intended to make their own expression or thoughts of what you read, but I just thought it was gearing you to think one way. You know, economically and politically right way. Even though you were supposed to use your own thought processes, you were still supposed to come to the same collective reasoning, and that's what I thought inquiry was about, and I thought that was wrong. I could think of one example. It was about putting people in a boat and who should jump off first and save the whole, and I didn't agree with that representation of society, you know, the slackers that don't do anything and the people that work hard to keep it going. it geared everyone to thinking, ya, people should jump off to save the rest, when the rest should be helping those people. "on one hand, the readings taught you to think in a whole bunch of different ways, but on the other hand, you had to think the way the teacher wanted you to. That might actually be good, because there are some people that were brought up by their parents and just believe everything their parents teach them, you know what I mean? So it's kind of good for them to hear other people's views, but I don't think that you should be tested on the teacher's point of view." "The tests were like, relate one reading to another reading, and I tried to figure it out, and I just was kind of confused." "We wrote a lot and spoke a lot so I don't understand what the purpose of having inquiry and speech and writing was." "I had a hard time in that one. I didn't see a big point to the course. It just seemed like it should have been an elective, like a

philosophy course. And then they tried to squeeze a little bit of technology in there, which they could have easily done, like they did, in writing and speech."

(Inquiry II) "I had American dream and I had a really good teacher and had a lot of fun. I don't know that I learned a lot that I didn't know already, but I guess it was just, we would watch a lot of movies and dissect them. We watched The Godfather and usually when I watch a movie I don't watch it for educational purposes, I just look solely at it for entertainment, and it was actually kind of fun to dissect the movie and how it related to integration and becoming a member of the country and some of the things they do to get there and, I don't know, it wasn't like we took some no-name movie from national geographic that nobody wanted to watch. This was a really popular movie that won a lot of awards, and it was really cool that we could do something so modern." "It should be a major goal of the course to get you thinking about different points of view." "I liked the abstract thought. It helped me adjust. You know, getting you to think in different ways." "ya, I agree. It made you start looking at things from a whole bunch of different perspectives. High school's kind of like, straight line thought. It's not really the same."

"My section was environment and we had a really tough teacher and it was an overall good class, but when I think about it now I don't think it had anything to do with anything. I just don't see where I'll ever use that again." "It was bad, it was really bad. I had violence and we just talked about communism and stuff. I don't know he had good ideas, but . . .it just never got me thinking on my own." "I had another one of those group projects and I got stuck with the biggest idiot in the world. It was so much information and this one kid who was not doing anything and was 20 minutes late and we got our grade knocked down for that." "In inquiry II, he'd ask what was your interpretation of what you read, and you'd tell him, and he'd say, no I don't think that's right, and I thought, you asked for my interpretation, what do you want from me?" "I was also confused by the readings in inquiry II. I chose the american dream and none of the reading we had talked about it. I thought the readings were actually worse in inquiry II than in inquiry I" "All the greek philosophy stuff, I mean, it was a lot of readings that I had trouble understanding. I don't think the professor did a good job of explaining them." "It was too abstract. For a first year student, you're just getting your mind set about what you do and think and it's like, you're still growing. It should be taken on an upper-level course." "I thought inquiry II was a total waste of time. I still think it should be an elective. I wish we could have hit on some subjects that hadn't been killed already. It seemed like most of the semester we were just going around in circles. We'd discuss all these ideas, and then never do anything with it." "nothing worked."

3. "The ideas that we use in writing you could use in the other classes." "I never really thought about it, but now that I think about it, especially writing and speech did. One of our projects, we had to write a paper in writing about something we'd done in inquiry and then we had to speak on it afterward. That was probably the best example." "I can see how writing and speech would be important for a first

year student. . . you're gonna have to do it. They both made you more comfortable with both parts of life; writing and speaking." "you write to speak, it's like the same thing, instead of putting on paper, you're putting it in words." "In inquiry, they had to get up in front of the class and talk." "I saw a big relationship between speech, writing, and inquiry I, cause I think that there were elements of changing view points and expressing your ideas. There was a lot of that. I don't see how inquiry II related to all of it very well." "the writing and speech class were closely related. I had writing the first semester, and it helped me with speech the next semester, cause, um, the speeches kind of went along with the writing we did, so I knew how to get information and stuff for the speeches I did." "I think that in all of them, ethics seemed to come up a lot. In speech and writing, in particular, about what you can and can't do, like documentation and motives, like in speech, why you use ethical motives, and in inquiry it was a lot more general, just about how you do things and relating to other people."

4. "I'll be doing something random and I'll think of something that we discussed in inquiry" "I do that too." "That's a good thing, you're a little more open-minded." "you had to learn not to suppress other people's opinions. That was very difficult, especially when you got to really touchy subjects like religion, and science vs. religion. You had to become very, very tolerant. That's probably the one thing that I took away from inquiry, the one thing of value. That 's not just something you need for college, that's something you need for life, like in the workplace, I mean, you're not just gonna agree with your peers or your boss. You have to learn to tolerate and see things from different points of view." "[Writing and speech] will always be beneficial." "even though I didn't like inquiry I, I think about some of that information sometimes, about authorities and stuff, I try to apply them to my classes. I don't necessarily write about them or anything, but I think, that's interesting. . ." "I think more about how other people might view situations, and this goes back to inquiry I, about how someone else might view situations, instead of just thinking about how I it, think, ok what might someone else see here? And then speech and then writing, especially writing, I've used the skills from that a lot." "I'm going to be using my speech skills pretty soon, I'm going to have to give a speech for an upcoming class. And writing skills, you use them on all the midterm papers." "for one of my education courses, I had to teach a 20-minute lesson. And so some of the things I learned in speech about visual aids, um, just all the different resources you should use, in addition to how you should look when you're up there speaking, how to use that so I would appear as a prepared enthusiastic teacher who looks like I know what I'm talking about when I'm up there teaching." "Speech and writing, those are things that you'll always use, and I'll always go back to it. But I don't know, inquiry, I really don't think I used any of that. I mean, it was a worthwhile experience, but . . ." "I used a little of my inquiry in my religion class, but I didn't find it beneficial at all this year "

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5. "I think speech and writing belong in the first year, for sure. You're gonna have more writing and talk all through your four years. Inquiry, I think it should be

optional." "It should be later." "I think it should be in the first year because it would be hard to have older people in your class." "I don't think you're too young to take it as a freshman. I had a class in high school that was called theory of knowledge, I had it my junior and senior year, and I thought it was way more advanced than inquiry. It was really hard core in depth, question everything, how do you know. I think the biggest thing with inquiry is that you have to make sure you have a professor that is really enthusiastic, and you can't control that." "I don't think the school should make people teach it. I had a professor who didn't want to teach it so he didn't. He goes, well I guess you have to do this stuff so, there are these movies, whatever. If no one was talking, he'd be like ok, leave. I was in class for 15 minutes sometimes. It was nice, it was right before lunch, but sometimes, I really wanted to talk about it, and nobody else would, and he really didn't push anyone to talk about it." "It does teach you to think in a different way." "I think the material is too advanced for the first year, because some of it was over my head." "The inquiry, I think they should make one semester." "That really wouldn't be a bad idea." "There should be more about stuff on TV and stuff on the news and less an the readings." "Some of the readings are very beneficial, and the topics were good, but something maybe a little bit more modern [would be better]." "Current events are way more important than anything." "I feel like I don't know anything about current events." "Keep writing and speech, I don't know about inquiry; it depends on the professor you get." "Writing and speech stay the same, inquiry should be one semester, and update the readings, and don't force the professors to do it." "I think that writing and speech should remain the same, and I thing that inquiry should be combined into one semester, in second semester, so that the students will know who to take." "I think that writing and speech should be combined and that inquiry should be in one semester. I kind of like the idea of it being in ones semester." "Writing and speech should stay the same, maybe writing should even be a year long, so the first semester you're getting the basics and maybe second semester you're writing a big paper, you know or something, and with the inquiry, I agree, having it one semester and second semester, cause, it's like, too much too fast for a first year student." "I agree that speech and writing should stay the same, with inquiry, I don't know if it should be first semester or second semester, because I don't know if people should choose it for the wrong reason, but, the professor should want to teach it, and um, it should have different material, like better readings and include things like popular movies and current events and things like that." "I think everyone should take writing first, because it seems like speech builds on writing." "I'd rename it [Inquiry] some type of philosophy course. The course name doesn't say that much about the class." "I felt like in the beginning of the freshman year I'm not taking anything for my major, like they're not even worth anything." "That's what I felt also, I don't know how they expect you to graduate in four years. They take up so much of your time." "Speech I think should be a first year course, but writing and inquiry, I think should be taken over the next three years." "I think they should combine it all into one course." "I agree, I think it would be a good idea to combine classes." "I'd keep the speech the same. The writing class should have a little less grammar and a little more reading. Inquiry should be more

coherent and maybe have more inquiry courses related to your major." "If you're a history or philosophy major, you should get credit toward your major [with inquiry]. "Writing and speech are good to have your first year. I use those the most." "Inquiry, you should be allowed to take anytime." "writing and speech should definitely be taken in the first year, and maybe even in the same semester, to brush up and make sure you're prepared in those areas. Inquiry II I would make an elective, or ditch it completely. Inquiry I, I'd say, probably keep it the first year, but maybe not the first semester. I'd say you have to take it anytime during the first two semesters."

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